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ABSTRACT

Research relating to the role of the home in child development and research on the role of parents as teachers, as well as some recommendations for home/school relationships are discussed as they pertain to the gifted child. Delineated are cognitive factors present in the homes of gifted children (e.g., planned cultural activities, verbal interaction, direct instruction of the child) and affective or emotional factors (e.g., consistency of management and discipline, security and self-esteem of family members, attitude of trust toward the world.) Findings of research on parents as teachers are presented, both for programs which focus heavily on training parents as teachers, and for programs which focus on teaching the child with some parental involvement. (Although each of the two approaches produce positive effects on achievement and language development, results seem to favor the programs with parents used as the primary focus.) Finally, suggestions for home/school relationships are offered, some of which include: homework involving family learning activities, provisions in the schools for the screening and guidance of the gifted, and the establishment of community learning centers. (A bibliography is appended.) (MF)

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Preconvention Institute XI

Fostering Reading in the Gifted and Creative; The Role of Creative Reading

Needed Types of Parental Guidance and Cooperation Between Home and School

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Parents are in again! We have rediscovered them as critical and valuable agents in the learning and development of their children. We are finding it increasingly difficult to keep them out of the schools and from the weight of the research evidence, we erred greviously in ever keeping them out. Parents are particularly important in the development of their gifted and creative children and the need for schools to work with these parents is increasingly clear. The studies repeatedly show the role of parents as they provide a home background conducive to the development of their children, as they interact with the school in a variety of relationships, and as they help their children on a continuing basis develop their gifts and talents. The present paper will discuss: (1) research relating to the role of the home in the development of children; (2) research relating to the role of parents as teachers in various relationships with school personnel; and (3) recommendations for needed types of home/school relationships to foster reading in gifted and creative children through creative reading experiences.

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The Homes of Gifted and Creative Children

One method for determining what factors are critical to the development of gifted and creative children is to study the homes of both gifted and non-gifted children to isolate those things that differentiate the homes. What is present in the homes of the gifted that is absent in the home of the non-

gifted? What do parents do in the homes of the gifted that is not done by parents in the homes of the non-gifted? What is the effect of socio-economic level on home characteristics for differentiating gifted and non-gifted children? Some of the most important research directed to answering these questions has been done by Ira Gordon and Robert Hess. Further significant studies have been conducted in other countries; but have relevance to the United States.

Gordon (1970) in his own research and in reviewing the research of others, identified a total of nineteen factors in parent behavior which are related to child performance. Not only is the presence of these factors important to child performance but also the degree to which the factor operates. Of the nineteen critical factors, nine are cognitive or intellectual and ten are emotional or affective. The cognitive factors are as follows:

1. academic guidance - The parents interest their children in learning and exploring activities and encourage them to ask questions and seek answers. They encourage their children to take the initiative and praise them for their efforts.
2. cognitive operational level and style - The parents encourage their children to reason and problem solve and test out their ideas with actions. The parents use this cognitive style themselves and provide a model of approach and style.
3. cultural activities planned - The parents structure plans for their children to have cultural experiences and expose them to a large variety of such activities. "Let's go to the zoo." "Let's attend the children's concert." "Let's watch this TV show." These are some of the planning strategies.

4. direct instruction of the child - The parents teach their children how to do a task, how to solve a problem, how to make choices, how to assess results, etc. In addition, the parents observe their children as they are learning and offer suggestions and encouragements as appropriate.

5. educational aspirations - The parents place high value on education and either actively encourage their children to participate in educational activities and goals or simply assume the children will place value on education because they themselves do. This is generally a valid assumption.

6. use of external resources - The parents have their children attend nursery school or kindergarten or they may place them in special summer activity programs, such as day camp. Many children learn to love books not only because their parents tend to love books but also because their parents have encouraged them to participate in "the children's hour" at many libraries.

7. intellectuality of the home - The parents have books and magazines around the home and usually have dictionaries and encyclopedias. The parents are seen reading these books and using them as references. They are also heard discussing what they have read.

8. verbal facility - The parents use their vocabularies effectively to help their children learn. They do not need large or elaborate vocabularies; they need to use them to clarify expectations and guide progress.

9. verbal frequency - The parents engage their children in

conversation during mealtime or on an auto trip or at family gatherings. There is more use of words and universal language then non-verbal signals and contextual language.

Children need not only cognitive stimulation from their parents but also emotional support if their gifts and talents are to reach fruition. Gordon identified the following ten emotional factors in parent behavior which are related to child performance:

1. consistency of management - The parents maintain a consistent and therefore predictable style of management or discipline so that the children know what is expected of them and what kinds of limits are clearly established. There are no shocking surprises or uncertainties.
2. differentiation of self - The parents do not confuse themselves with their children. They know where their personality ends and another's begins.
3. disciplinary pattern - The parents behave in their own lives with a sense of self-discipline and an expression of this in their daily performance. The children accept patterns of behavior expressive of this discipline and imitate the models.
4. emotional security, self-esteem - The parents feel safe and loved and respect themselves as significant individuals. They thus have emotional energy available to provide emotional security to their children and opportunities for the child to develop self-esteem.
5. impulsivity - The parents do not engage in erratic, unpredictable behavior, but rather have their behavior under some rational

control without repressing creative thoughts and feelings.

6. belief in internal control - The parents stress the importance of building internal controls rather than relying on external controls. Closely allied to this is the belief in asssuming responsibility for their own behavior.

7. protectiveness, babying of child - The parents recognize the dependency of their children and are willing to permit them to act out that dependency. The parents provide the protective, nurturing behavior necessary for children to feel protected.

8. trusting attitude - The parents trust each other and trust their children. They encourage their children to trust others and to be receptive to learning experiences others might provide. Children who distrust others learn in a distorted way.

9. willingness to devote time to the children - The parents plan activities for their children and enjoy spending time carrying out these activities. Parents need to communicate their pleasure in spending time with their children.

10. work habits - The parents demonstrate to their children that they have developed work habits which permit for the acceptance and completion of an activity. The parents would also place value on a high level of performance and quality work. They, in effect, respect what they do.

Hess (1971) in his research as well as in a recent review, identified nine categories of parent behavior which influence child development. They are: (1) independence training, (2) warmth and high emotional involvement, (3) consistency of discipline, (4) explanatory control, (5) expectation for success, (6) parents' sense o

control, (7) the verbalness in the home, (8) parents' direct teaching, and (9) parental self-esteem.

A number of studies of infants support the contention that parents influence the development of their children.

The Illinois study, for example, found several items which consistently related to child cognitive performance in the first two years of life. These were: "There is at least one magazine placed where the child could play with it or look at it; the child was given regular training in one or more skills; the mother spontaneously vocalizes to the child; the mother spontaneously names at least one object to the child while the observer is in the home; the father helped take care of the child; the father played with the child at least ten minutes a day; the child is regularly spoken to by parents during mealtimes" (T.D. Wachs, I.C. Uzgiris, and J. McV. Hunt, 1971, pp. 295-304).

G.W. Miller (1971), in reviewing the research on the relationships between family variables and scholastic performance in the English schools, lists the following as positively related to school performance: homes where independent thinking and freedom of discussion occur, where there are values conducive to intellectual effort, where children's curiosity and academic aspirations are supported, and in which there is harmony between home and school values. J.P. Keeves (1970), in an extensive study of children in the Australian capitol territory, uncovered relationships between school performance of early adolescents and home environment. He reported that "the importance of the mother's attitudes and ambitions stands out quite clearly, but are exceeded in importance by the provision made in the home for stimulation to learn and to promote intellectual development" (p. 29). In a study in Utrecht, Holland, J.C. Rupp (1969) indicated the "cultural-pedagogical aspects of upbringing" and found that when high achievers were compared with low achievers within the lowest socio-economic class, the high achievers came from homes in which parents

held this cultural-pedagogical point of view. They saw themselves as educators. They practiced this by "reading to the child, playing table games and word games with him, providing educational toys and books, read and possess books themselves, tell their children informative things of their own accord, teach their children preschool skills, go to places of interest" (p. 176).

It is important to note how frequently emotional factors are identified as critical to promoting gifts and talents in children. Not only do parents help their children more when they themselves have a good sense of who they are, a feeling of stability and emotional security, a sense of control and worth, but they need to be supportive and encouraging of their children. Patterns of parental indifference, rejection or oversolicitude impair the children's development and may crush their talents. One expression of this turmoil is underachievement. (Gowan (1955), Grotberg (1962).

The assumption that gifted and creative children come only from advantaged homes or higher-income homes is questionable. In earlier studies from Terman (1925-1959) to Ruth Martinson (1961), reports are clear that gifted and creative children emerge from a cross-section of the socio-economic spectrum.

Cordon (1971) in a careful review of the research on the effect of socio-economic level of the home on the development of the child found some evidence that middle income parents tended to have more effective techniques with their children than low-income parents. However, he cautioned that his research, as well as that of Hess and Shipman (1967), B.L. White (1972) and J.C. Watts (1971), indicate there is tremendous variability within social class groups. Gordon states: "If we are interested in identifying particular parental attributes which we feel are desirable, then social class is not a usable label" (p. 6). He goes on to say: "Our infant research all clearly indicate

that the amount of conversation in the home, particularly the amount directed toward the child, relates significantly to child performance" (p. 6).

These studies were all descriptive studies and identified parent behaviors which differentially affected child development. From these and other descriptive studies or, indeed, independent of such studies, research has attempted to foster those characteristics in parents which will enhance the development of their children. The characteristics fostered are those of a teacher.

Parents as Teachers

Parents provide an environment in which their children are totally immersed. Most of the early childhood experiences are within a parent-determined environment, but parents are generally unaware that they are performing as teachers. Parents need to be made aware of their role as teachers and then to acquire teaching skills to enhance the development of their children. Research describes how parents, once aware of their role, affect the learning of their children. Teaching includes setting the stage for learning, modeling, managing the environment, giving information and engaging in direct interaction. These components of teaching are incorporated in numerous research studies. The research findings relate to the effects on children of: (1) programs which focus heavily on training the parents as teachers; and (2) programs which focus heavily on teaching the child with some parent involvement as teachers.

Virtually all of the recent and current research relating to parents as teachers address themselves to low-income parents and their children. Those few studies which include middle income and mixed socio-economic groups use these groups mainly for comparison purposes. Almost without exception the parent involved is the mother. Few fathers have participated in these programs; those who have are apt to have participated either in decision-making positions

or in programs designed to increase the skill of the father for his own development.

Programs focusing on training parents as teachers.

Programs which are largely parent-oriented training programs include training parents to work in the home with their own children, using television as a media of instruction and training parents through group discussion teachniques.

In almost all the studies in which mothers are trained to be tutors of their own children in their homes, the children showed greater immediate gains in intellectual, conceptual or language development. These findings occur in projects involving home visits only, in preschool projects operated in the home, in preschool plus home visiting projects, and in projects in which the mothers are trained to work at home with their children but receive few if any home visits. Joyce Lazar and Judith Chapman (1972) report that in four studies parent teaching with or without a preschool component resulted in greater immediate effect on children's language, intellectual or academic achievement than a preschool program only. In one project which was concerned with infants before one year of age, superiority of the experimental group children was not maintained at age two if parent teaching was terminated at one year of age, but it was maintained if parent teaching continued until the child reached age two.

Though relatively few studies have included a follow-up of these home teaching programs, those which did usually report that gains continued to be apparent. In two projects having only a home visit and which initiated parent teaching after age one, IQ levels remained significantly above or at the initial testing. In two projects involving preschool plus home visits, experimental group children showed beneficial effects without further parent teaching upon entering school and through the middle primary grades.

The few results available on the impact of parent teaching in association with mass media child development efforts suggest that parent encouragement and parent-child activities associated with educational TV programs for young children may enhance the cognitive gains made by the children as a result of the TV program.

Though difficult, it is possible to engage a sizeable proportion of low-income mothers of preschool children in groups to discuss concerns about themselves, their communities and their children. A number of studies have reported that the skill and sensitivity of the group leader or trainer is crucial in getting the attendance of the parents and in subsequently engaging them in active participation in the group. While those parents who attend such groups represent a self-selected population which no doubt differs from the non-attending parents, those who do attend generally express positive feelings about the effect of the group experience on themselves and on the behavior of their children. A number of studies have reported greater success in gaining attendance and participation of mothers when the content of the program was specific, such as language development,rather than sensitivity training or general discussions of child development. Two studies have reported greater immediate gains on the tests utilized for the children when the mothers took part in a structural language curricula than when other types of discussion groups were utilized. Follow-up on most studies has been lacking.

Programs focusing on children with some parent teaching

These programs focus primarily on the child while the parent component is of secondary or even incidental emphasis. However even among these studies children in a preschool program tend to show greater immediate mean gains in IQ and achievement when their parents participate in a parent educational component

aimed at increasing cognitive development. Other studies report no significant differences among the groups of children, but have found some differences in attitude among the mothers. Some studies have reported greater group gains among mothers and children when the mothers have participated in a specific language training program to augment the program of their children than when mothers take part in other group activities. One study indicates the possibility of "sleeper" effects in that attitude change among the mothers in the experimental group during the first year was not reflected in differences between group of children until a later follow-up. A number of ongoing and completed studies are attempting to bring about changes in mother-child interaction through behavior modification techniques which would supplement the program focusing primarily on the child.

In summary, most of the studies which have focused on training mothers as teachers of their children report positive immediate effects on the IQ, achievement or language development of the children. Studies which have provided a parent teaching component as an adjunct to an ongoing children's program also show positive changes among the children but not with the same frequency as when parents are the primary focus of the training.

Home/School Relationships

Homes cannot become schools any more than schools can become homes. They have unique functions which need to be maintained and respected. Nor can there be an unrestricted open door policy. Schools should not tolerate an unannounced invasion by parents any more than homes should tolerate the unannounced home visit by teachers. The two institutions need some clear areas of separate autonomy. But, respecting the uniqueness of each institution, there remain large areas of interface or, indeed, cooperation, and it is to these areas that we must address ourselves if we want our gifted and talented children to fulfill themselves.

The interaction between home and school may take place in the home, in the school, or preschool, or in a neighborhood learning center. Evidence has already been provided from the research literature that such interactions benefit children, but the research has not exhausted the possible ways of home/school cooperation nor has it generally addressed itself to home/school cooperation where older children are concerned. The recommendations presented here, then, are partially based on research evidence but attempt to go beyond that evidence to what seem appropriate additional recommendations based on observation and experience.

1. Bring the school to the home. The expertise of the school is in learning-teaching. The school has materials, curricula, and a vast array of ideas and skills addressing themselves to the learning-teaching phenomenon. The school may bring these materials, ideas and skills into the home through a home visitor, a resource teacher, a mobile unit. The school personnel may demonstrate activities in the home, leave materials on a lend-lease basis or leave materials appropriate for a TV show. The parents may ask questions, report progress and indeed demonstrate their skills with their children.

   As children advance in school they themselves can bring home materials and activities to use with their parents for the insights and assistance to be derived from their parents. Homework is the activity generally brought home and this seems to be designed to separate students from parents rather than have students benefit from the knowledge of their parents. Older children might bring home materials for their younger brothers and

sisters and enjoy the experience of teaching them, reading to them, or engaging in some learning activity with them.

2. Bring the home to the school. Parents should be able to use the school facilities for a number of purposes to help their children.

   a. Use the library - Schools need to include library materials directed to parents who wish to select books to read for deeper understanding of their children, to read to their children, or to learn how to do things with their children. The International Reading Association published a helpful guide Reading for the Gifted and the Creative Student, edited by Paul Witty, and published last year.

   b. Have their children screened - Many promising children are handicapped by perceptual problems and learning difficulties. Parents take their children to medical doctors for health problems and dentists with dental problems. Teachers should provide preschool as well as in-school screening to identify learning problems.

      Screening for talent is also an important service the school might provide. Talents and gifts need nurturing from early childhood and many parents either do not recognize the gifts of their children or do not know what they can do to help their children. Some schools are already providing early screening services and guiding parents in readings and activities to enhance the talents of their children.

   c. Observe classroom activities - Parents who watch their children functioning in a classroom are able to learn a great

deal about how children's learning is enhanced. Indeed, with some guidance from the teachers, the parents may supplement classroom activities in order to reinforce the learning experiences. Often it is the dichotomy between home and school that presents problems to children.

d. Attend cultural activities - The school needs to be a cultural center for families. When children perform in plays, in the orchestra, or have an art exhibit, both they and their parents may share a cultural activity. Indeed some schools involve parents in organizing and planning for cultural activities.

3. Establish community learning centers. As an alternative to the home or the school being the locus for home/school cooperation, a community learning center has been suggested. This concept emerges from the increased awareness that the whole child and not only his cognitive development must be the focus of our attention if children are to develop to their fullest. A community learning center might have materials on health and physical well-being, might have a pediatritican, a psychologist and an educator. Parents would bring their children to the center for diagnosis and screening to identify problems and to determine gifts and talents. At the same center, the parents might be provided with materials, books, and guidance in using them with their children. The entire family could attend activities together in the eveing or on week-ends and extend the children's learning experiences in a larger social community.

Many of these recommednations are in operation or are in the process of being implemented. All of the services must, of course, be used at the option of the parents.

But there seems little risk that such services will not be used. Parents have become extremely sensitive to their role in enhancing the development of their children, to the need for early identification and stimulation of gifts and talents and to the need to look to schools and other community resources to help them. The school may, indeed, lag behind parents in these understandings and may need some prodding from the parents. For the sake of the gifts and talents of their children, let them prod.

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